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Governor's office secures funding for Libby health care study

Governor Judy Martz announced Sept. 12 that her office has secured up to \$40,000 to fund a study to help determine the long-term health care needs for persons suffering from diseases as a result of exposure to tremolite asbestos.

The funding will be used to examine records of individuals who showed abnormalities in initial medical screenings, and to study the progression of tremolite asbestos-related diseases in individuals to get a clearer picture of the costs of meeting long-term health care needs.

"Estimating the costs is absolutely critical in securing future health care funding that will provide the security and peace of mind

residents in the Libby area deserve," Mrs. Martz said in a press release to *The Montanian*.

The funding will be received from the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR), which is an agency within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, under the direction of Secretary Tommy Thompson. The recommendation to pursue funding for such a study was brought forward by the Governor's Libby Health Care Study Group, which was formed in August.

"Secretary Thompson and the staff of ATSDR have continually stepped forward to provide assistance for the residents of Libby. We



Gov. Judy Martz

appreciate their ongoing support, specifically in securing this much-needed funding for the study," said Mrs. Martz. "As we move forward to address health issues in Libby, accurate information about the health care needs of those exposed to tremolite asbestos and the associated costs of meeting those needs will be key."

One of the governor's key priorities is the development of a White Lung Program for persons exposed to asbestos. This program would be similar to the current Black Lung Program, established to provide health care services to coal miners suffering from black lung and other respiratory diseases that are attributed to their occupa-

tion. The funding provided by ATSDR will help gain further information for such a program.

Montana's Department of Public Health and Human Service is finalizing and agreement with ATSDR to conduct additional screenings in Libby. This funding will be provided through that same agreement.

The Governor's Libby Health Care Study group met on Thursday, Sept. 12, from 2-4 p.m. via video teleconference. Participating sites included Kalispell Regional Medical Center, St. Patrick Hospital in Missoula, St. John's Lutheran Hospital in Libby, and the MHA Board Room in Helena.